

**GLOBAL BUSINESS & ECONOMIC ROUNDTABLE ON ADDICTION & MENTAL HEALTH**

*The Roundtable is affiliated with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health*  
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Text of Speech

By

Bill Wilkerson  
Roundtable Co-Founder and CEO

To

“Beyond Awareness” Conference  
A Campaign to Reduce the Stigma of Mental Illness

Sponsored by

NYS Office of Mental Health  
Mental Health Association of New York City  
SUNY Upstate Medical University

Albany, New York  
February 6, 2002

**“SINCE SEPTEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup> – THE BUSINESS STATE OF MIND”**  
*Mental Health In The Knowledge Economy*

*Check Against Delivery*

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**“SINCE SEPTEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup> – THE BUSINESS STATE OF MIND”**

***Mental Health in the Knowledge Economy***

*(Bill Wilkerson is Co-Founder and CEO of the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health. He is also a business man, crisis management expert, former chief and senior executive in banking, broadcasting, and health services. He has done three tours of duty in government. Wilkerson is an author and consultant serving as Senior Counsel to GPC International)*

The Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health is a network not an organization. It is voluntary and non-profit and supports the deployment of business capital in the war on another kind of terrorism sweeping the world – mental illness.

Broadly, the Roundtable has three purposes.

One is to develop management and business practice standards which equip business to defend and protect its investment in its people at a time when mental health disorders and addictions are on the rise.

The second broad purpose is to defeat stigma. It is a barrier to the early detection and treatment of mental health disorders worldwide

The third purpose is to head off what I call the 2020 scenario.

The Harvard School of Public Health has projected that unipolar depression and ischemic heart disease will become – according to current trends – the leading sources of workdays lost in the global economy through disability and premature death.

We must not let this happen. There is time if there is will. Heart disease and depression feed off each other. Both can breed and multiply in work environments polluted by toxic stress.

The Roundtable is comprised of leaders in business and science – mostly, so far, Canadian-based. This is changing.

### **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health**

Proudly, we are affiliated with one of the world's leading psychiatric research, treatment and teaching hospitals. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health is one of only four World Health Organizations Centres of Excellence.

With them, we are searching for new combinations of research which will unify business management and scientific knowledge to fight mental illness as a business and economic imperative.

### **GPC International**

GPC International, our principal business affiliate, has offices in the U.S. and is part of Fleishman-Hillard, one of the largest public relations firms in the U.S. and Omnicom Group Inc., not only the world's largest advertising and communications organizations – but, in fact, one of America's best-run companies as declared by Fortune Magazine.

We are proud of this association.

### **Wide Range Of Sectors**

In supporting the Roundtable, GPC keeps pretty decent company. Our friends in business represent a range of sectors from oil and gas to real estate and financial services.

Notably, the Honorable Michael Wilson, former Minister of Finance of Canada, and former director of both IMF and World Bank, is Senior Chairman of the Roundtable. Mr. Wilson is President and CEO of Brinson Canada Co., formerly RT Capital, a world-scale asset and pension management firm.

Brinson, in turn, is owned by Brinson partners in New York – part of Swiss-owned UBS Asset Management Group, one of the largest in its field.

Roundtable founding members also include board chairmen and CEOs of Canadian firms who felt the effects of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. We have common cause in the wake of these events.

In all, the Roundtable's friends represent Canadian and U.S. corporate assets in the hundreds of billions of dollars.

### **A Global Issue**

Mental health is a global business issue. We live and work in a global economy. We must have global reach. The Roundtable's growing reach reflects that.

Events on September 11<sup>th</sup> was a clear signal that our national security has been threatened. A sense of danger has taken hold in a rather personal way.

The Pentagon attack symbolized an attack on democracy and freedom.

The buildings that fell in New York symbolized the free market system.

### **Grieving For People Not Computers**

We saw CEO's grieve the loss of their people. We didn't see them weep for their computers or office space. In the face of massive layoffs of people and continued investments in technology hardware, let's hear the message in that.

We saw the faces of business covered in thick white dust – but alive; we also saw the faces of business smiling in melancholy “missing person” photos.

Reflecting the courageous actions of those confronted by the Pentagon disaster, we saw the supervisors and managers of business organizations in New York leading their staff down stairwells and going back for others.

We heard the owner of one investment firm shout into the smoke – “my people, my people.”

We read corporate ads in the New York Times talking about the human spirit that lived inside the places of work housed by the buildings that fell.

We saw companies suffering a loss to which their leaders testified publicly and emotionally. It was a loss of people. The loss of the true assets of business.

### **People Not Machines**

It is no revelation that people not machines, do the value-added work of business. They make the sale. Keep the customer. Generate the revenue. Improve the product. We know all that. But as business people, do we act as if we understand it?

Do we adequately protect our investment in people or routinely squander it through 11th hour business decisions which produce downsizings on a mass scale?

In the face of what Chairman Greenspan of the U.S. Federal Reserve calls an “unforgiving capitalist system and often irrational stock market” – do we – and I include me, over 30 years in business – all too abruptly, all too often decimate that investment in the interests of protecting share value in the short-term against the often irrational behavior of an emotion-driven stock market.

Mr. Greenspan says that “for good or ill, an unforgiving capitalist process is driving wealth creation.” He says it has become increasingly difficult for policy makers who wish to practice a more “caring capitalism to realize the full potential of their economies.”

If we were to care more about the investment we already have in our labor force, is that a proposition we should allow to be rejected by irrational institutional investors who regularly over-value some stocks while under-valuing others – creating chaos in the job market along the way?

Consider the emotion afloat on any large stock exchange floor. Brawling. Shouting. This informs business decisions that produce mass job cuts in defense of share value?

### **Unforgiving Capitalism**

As business people, we have created, fostered and functioned in a bloodless culture of downsizing. A culture in which a whole generation of human resource managers were born and bred, with little else than large-scale job cutting as their defining role.

As a result, the human resource profession, in my judgment, has grown increasingly inward, simplistic and disempowered.

As irrationality of the stock market deepens, business decision-making that is driven by it becomes more emotional and less rational itself. In the storm that ensues, jobs – and people – are costs to be cut not investments to protect.

This is happening even as ATT CEO Michael Armstrong warns us of the effects of a growing shortage of skilled workers in the contemporary market place.

This pattern must change if for no other reason than to reduce the enormous shortage of skilled workers facing companies all over the world.

### **“Thought Content” Of Products And Services**

But the reasons for change go beyond that. From the early nineties to the present hour, like no other time in our modern industrial history, business is fundamentally dependent on the capacity of its labor force to think – to think clearly, concentrate, be creative and alert, have good relationships at work.

With the revolution in micro processing, we entered the economy of mental performance.

This is the era of brain power not brawn power in the workplace.

This is an economy where business and economic productivity will continue to lag as long as people face constant uncertainty about their jobs, huge stress at work and soaring rates of depression and anxiety.

The economy of mental performance was spawned by the information revolution.

Today, for the first time, corporations worldwide spent more money on telecommunications equipment – the bloodstream of human contact in the globalized world – than oil, the blood of machines. Our way of doing business changed.

### **Innovation: A Mental Function**

Information and innovation have become the keys to competitive success. And to use these keys, business needs skilled, motivated, reliable and available people. Lots of them.

Innovation is the key to competitive success in the global economy. Innovation is delivered through digital technology. Innovation is a human mental function.

The economy of mental performance is fed not by financial capital alone – or even mostly. The CEO of Citibank once said information about money is more important than money itself.

But in this environment, information is a dead asset without people communicating, interpreting, using it, giving it economic and commercial value.

In this context, we see that human capital, human motivation, knowledge, perspective, judgment, the ability to communicate, share ideas and have relationships drive the global economy of information and mental performance.

### **Innovation And Mental Health**

Consider this. Industrial innovation defines competitive success in the global economy. It also defines human mental health.

In the economy of mental performance, the value-added of new products and services is the “thought content” employees put into them. Consider these two examples:

- In the automotive sector, the dollar sales value of the “thought content” built-into cars coming off the production line – in the form of design, efficiency and safety features – exceed the dollar of the steel housing those cars.

- In the steel industry, it takes less time to produce a ton of steel today than it did a few years ago thanks to innovative thinking by people using the latest in computer technology.

In these terms, the corporate asset value of people – and the collateral supporting this asset known as mental health – is well grounded.

The economy of mental performance pays a premium for thought content. And therefore, it pays a premium for mental health – even without knowing it.

### **Minds Will Do The Heavy Lifting**

In these terms, we see the tremendous stake business has in the state of mind of its people – and let's be clear, in this competitive 21<sup>st</sup> century environment, the minds of individuals – not their backs or arms or legs – will do the heavy lifting for business.

This is the guts of the business case for mental health – a case that must be made powerfully and pragmatically because it will be a major weapon in containing a pandemic of mental illness and distress now unfolding across the world – a pandemic going largely uncalculated by nations, policymakers and business leaders and described by Harvard as an “unheralded crisis in world mental health.”

This crisis has jarring relevance to the prospects and plans of business.

### **Mental Disability: Public Health Enemy Number One**

Mental health problems are the leading source of human disability in the world today. For business, human disability is public health enemy number one.

Stress and mental health-related problems represent 40 to 50 per cent of the short-term disability claims among employees of some of the world's largest corporations.

Since 1994, depressive disorders have grown 100 per cent as a percentage of STD and LTD claims, 40 per cent as a percentage of workers compensation claims and 55 per cent across all categories of disability-related absences from work.

As a percentage of the global burden of disease, depression is growing faster than cardiovascular disease.

### **Lawyers And Depression**

The Canadian Bar Association reports escalating rates of depression and addictions among lawyers – alcoholism three times the rate of the general population. Excessive hours, relentless competition, an unyielding demand within law firms to grow billable hours are the apparent carriers of this particular virus.

Depression and anxiety attack 20-30 per cent of the population at any given hour – mostly people in their prime working years. Depression targets the young. The average age of onset is 27 – and 20 in nearly half the cases. Mental illness strikes more people than breast cancer or diabetes and yet receives a fraction of the research dollars.

The price tag of depression is about \$60 billion (US) a year in North America alone. Two-thirds of these costs occur in the form of economic and business loss. In total, mental health disorders and addictions cost this country \$150 million a year and Canada, our latest findings tell us, nearly \$22 million.

In Canada, the cost of mental illness equates to 14 per cent of the combined corporate profits of all Canadian companies, most American-owned, and four per cent of our national debt.

Depression – combined with addictions and anxiety disorders – has replaced the historical threats to worker health associated with air quality, unsafe plant sites and dangerous manufacturing practices as work and health priorities, and yet these conditions are detected and properly treated in a small fraction of the actual number of cases existing in the world today – less than 10 per cent.

This is shameful. And one of the most dramatic expressions of the impact of stigma on our understanding and response to problems of the brain and human mind.

Despair among people in the private sector likely costs business annually more than strikes and product defects.

Call centers threaten to become the sweatshop of the information economy.

Business pays two-thirds of all costs associated with mental illness in the form of lost productivity, absenteeism, disability, wage replacement costs and employee group health premiums and prescription drugs.

The world before September 11<sup>th</sup> was an intense, stressful and uncertain place for many or most breadwinners. Since September 11<sup>th</sup>, that much more so.

### **Era Of Homeland Danger**

As the era of homeland danger enfolds, pervasive job insecurity, economic turmoil and weak or ambiguous business leadership take an even greater toll on the state of mind of breadwinners in all walks of life.

This has been called a time of transition between the world before September 11<sup>th</sup> and the world after. In making that transition, I submit that it falls to business to protect its strategic investment in its people – its vital asset – and, therefore, by definition of the economy of mental performance in which we compete, in their emotional and mental health.



In doing so, business must recognize and contain certain forces now afoot in the global economy of mental performance:

**First**, the tyranny of mental illness. Business has it within its power – and in defense of its own enlightened self-interest – to open a new front in this old war.

**Second**, toxic workplace stress on a mass scale. While we apprehend the effects of chemical warfare on our population, so too must we understand the invasion of workplace stress now attacking human biochemistry and physical and mental health on an unheard-of scale.

**Third**, anger and rage in our places of work and on our highways. Unfairness – one unto the other of us – from positions of power to less power – is a trigger of this phenomenon and predictor of illness and injury at work.

In the context shaped by these forces, let me review briefly a business the Roundtable's recommended approach to emotional distress and mental illness as business and economic issues.

### **Vision 2020**

First, the target.

Twenty years out, depression and heart disease, if we let them, will destroy more economic productivity through disability and premature death than any other source in developed or developing nations alike

Let it be our goal to prevent that calamity. And it is preventable.

We propose a business plan to combat mental health disorders in an environment intensified by events on September 11, 2001. In this context, I am pleased to join Fred Dufour in releasing today a strategy paper on managing the psychological impact of terrorism in the workplace.

### **Venue For Earlier Detection**

In this Strategy Paper for business, we see the workplace becoming a primary venue through which to improve dramatically the rates of early detection, diagnosis and treatment of depression and anxiety – plus the addictions they intermingle with.

Depression is treatable and beatable in 80 per cent of the cases. But it is diagnosed and treated in only a handful.

### **Stress Buster Bonus**

We propose financial targets to incent managers and executives to root out the conditions of work which produce toxic stress and mental illness. A stress-buster bonus.

### **EAP Reforms**

We propose comprehensive reforms of employee and family assistance plans by customizing them for mental health purposes.

### **Business-Health Treaty**

We advocate clear-cut employee referral systems to connect the workplace with mental health professionals in a more coherent way. We call for the U.S. and Canada's psychological and psychiatric associations to join business in a treaty of enlightened and effective response to the threat to human health posed by the 2020 scenario.

We call this treaty **Vision 2020** – a state of high alert and informed action to protect the mental health of the continental labor force in the face of a potential work and health disaster two decades hence.

### **Training**

We call for managerial and supervisor training to help our front-line personnel deal more effectively with human behavior and the symptoms they may represent.

### **Fairness**

We know that unfairness produces seething and rumination among those on the receiving end. Both of these may be predictors of depression.

We need models of managerial and executive performance assessment which promote the doctrine of fairness. Well-run businesses already do this.

### **Work Climates**

Organizational health – work climates – predict mental distress as much or more than employee behavior, lifestyle or health status. Therefore, we need “workplace designs” and “work organization models” which promote both healthy lifestyles and healthy work climates.

Lack of control over one's daily job is a bigger threat to the cardiac health of employees than smoking.

### **Email Ceasefire**

We call for email ceasefires across the global economy.

We call – most vigorously – for office protocols which regulate the excessive use of email systems. We call for preventative measures to modify the custom of accepting 200 emails as a normal feature of the workday.

We call for interventions to intercept the emergency of the 24/7 workday.

### **Staged Return-To-Work**

We visualize specific protocols to guide the return-to-work of employees disabled by mental illness – specifically depression and anxiety.

Staged return-to-work policies – formalized within bargaining agreements where necessary – and without reference to diagnosis – are called for under the broad heading of work and health.

With doctor-patient confidentiality intact, heart disease and depression are worthy targets of such a protocol.

### **Physics of Mental Illness**

We call upon business leaders to become informed about the physics of mental illness. Beyond heart disease, the risks extend to infectious disease, thyroid disease, blood disease, respiratory disease and cancer recovery.

### **End Stigma**

The stigmatization of mental illness must end.

We call for a world wide web education campaign to eliminate the ignorance, mythology, prejudice and plain public inattention which has engulfed mental health and rendered it virtually voiceless and friendless from one generation to the next.

This global fight against stigma should start in earnest in 2002, by coordinating so much good work already going on in so many countries and aiming to declare victory by 2006.

### **Emotional Work Hazards**

We believe business must chronicle and eliminate emotional work hazards which predict lateness, absenteeism and mental distress – starting with the Roundtable’s top ten sources of stress.

### **End Office Politics**

We call for steps to root out the corrosive effects of office politics.

### **Healthy Productivity**

We call for qualitative indices to design and measure healthy productivity practices.

Call Centers are a priority.

### **Quality of Life Management**

In the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> world, we believe more – much more – must be done to protect the investment of business in its people.

We envision a series of business-savvy “quality of life” management practices which supplement – and go beyond – the plan I have just described.

### **Managing Anger And Distrust**

Places of work must become fully-outfitted centers of information in the management of personal anger (on the one hand) and employee distrust (on the other).

### **Very Young And Very Old**

Places of work must become centers of information in the management of parental anxiety relevant to the fears of their children and elderly dependents in the face of television, movie and Internet imagery flowing from the war on terrorism.

Let the needs of the very young and the very old be a barometer of our wisdom in calming a society in which hundreds of millions of everyday people are hurried, worried and rattled by change.

### **Clarity**

Business must put a new premium on clear communication with its employees about the future.

### **Moratorium on Mass Layoffs**

The fundamental principles of business planning must be reasserted by shareholders and boards of directors alike to rein-in in the unbridled spread of mass layoffs – where they occur – in the so-called defense of share value.

### **Most Vulnerable Jobs**

In this way, we could work to truly defend our investment in the “thought content” of our products and services and the human asset where that content originates. We could truly mobilize to roll back the pandemic of mental disorders confronting the global economy.

### **The Most Vulnerable**

In this quest, specific jobs must get additional emotional support – such as nurses, teachers, long-haul truck drivers, call center operators. These people are especially vulnerable in a climate of high demand and low reward.

### **Deadline Harassment**

Business human resource managers must be called upon to declare war on verbal abuse and what I would call “deadline harassment” born of the intensity of work environments and severe time compression.

The early capitalist Adam Smith – no bleeding heart – recognized at the dawn of America’s free enterprise system that healthy workers – justly-treated people – were more likely to do good work. Let his words be heard today.

### **Personal Note**

A final word and a personal note, if I may.

I have lived all my life near the Canadian – US border – Niagara Fall, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto.

I am Canadian.

But since September 11<sup>th</sup>, like millions of other people of other nationalities, I now know I am more than that.

In grieving the loss of America, in my heart, I am American, too.

In bearing witness to America’s courage, and wishing to be nourished by it, I am American, too.

In observing America’s vivid sense of national identity in the face of momentous crisis – and being inspired by it, I say – modestly, humbly, respectfully – I am American, too.

And I thank you for that.

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Phone: 416 598-0055 \* Fax: 416 598-3811 \* Email: [bill.wilkerson@gpcinternational.com](mailto:bill.wilkerson@gpcinternational.com)**TOP 10 SOURCES OF WORKPLACE STRESS**

10. The treadmill syndrome. Too much to do at once, requiring the 24-hour workday.
9. Random interruptions.
8. Doubt. Employees aren't sure what is happening, where things are headed.
7. Mistrust. Vicious office politics disrupt positive behavior.
6. Unclear company direction and policies.
5. Career and job ambiguity. Things happen without the employee knowing why.
4. Inconsistent performance management processes. Employees get raises but no reviews or get positive evaluation, but are laid off afterward.
3. Being unappreciated.
2. Lack of two-way communication up and down.
1. Too much or too little to do. The feeling of not contributing and having a lack of control.